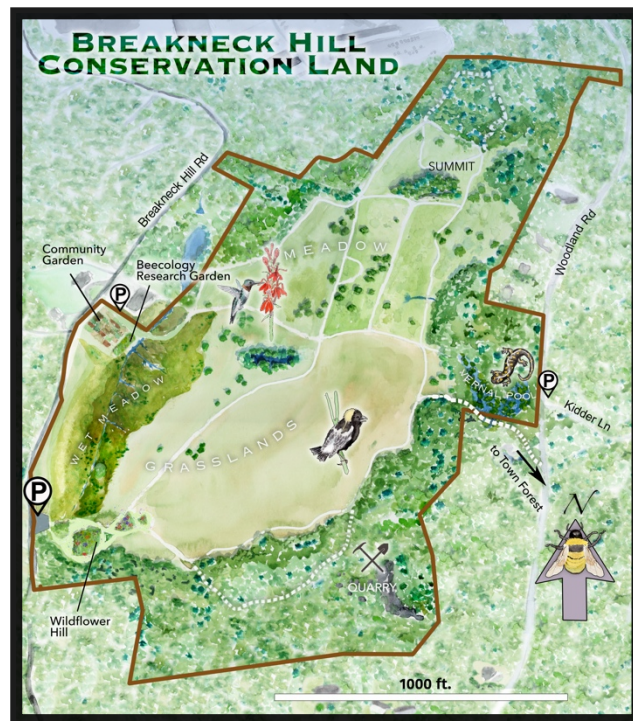


Stewardship Committee 2024 Annual Report

Mission: To provide conservation-based stewardship of the Breakneck Hill Conservation Land and Town Forest, balancing multiple conservation and passive recreation uses.

The Stewardship Committee's dedicated group of volunteers continued its efforts throughout 2024 to create habitat for at-risk species of wildlife, to manage invasive plants, and to provide an inviting space for passive recreation for Southborough residents. To that end, they installed a beautiful new map at the trailhead kiosk.



The Stewards also made strides in the foundational steps for establishing a new roadside meadow. Given the considerable seedbank of invasive plants on the conservation land, the Stewards have embraced the measured approach necessary for ensuring a slow success over a fast failure.

As we have since 2015, the Stewards continued collaborating with Dr. Robert Gegear, a professor at the University of Massachusetts. His research findings have guided our planting at the Beecology Research Garden which features plants documented to support at-risk pollinators. Those plants continue to attract native bumblebees in decline, such as *bombas fervidus* and *bombas vagans*, as well as a wide variety of butterflies and birds.

The Stewards manage a considerable portion of the Breakneck Hill acreage as grasslands—a habitat in steep decline nationwide. Our success is notable in that we have documented bobolinks nesting again in 2024.

The Stewards face ongoing challenges in managing the many invasive plants at Breakneck Hill. These include Bradford pear, autumn olive, multiflora rose, bittersweet, and creeping buttercup, among others. We newly documented porcelain berry on the edge of the property, and keep on the lookout for burning bush and Japanese knotweed. We work with experts to determine the best methods to manage and eradicate those invasive plants. At the same time, we work to mark and protect important native species across the property, which includes native honeysuckles, native roses, pussy willows, and others.

This past year, we supported the Conservation Commission's work to fulfill the Town's obligation to clean up the refuse from an old farm dump on the conservation land. We worked with the Conservation Agent Melissa Danza, the Commissioners, and the contractors to minimize damage to the trails and habitat. This required the Stewards to close the trail access by Community Gardens as a matter of safety.

The Stewards also provided considerable input to the proposed 40B development at 120 Turnpike Road, which abuts the Breakneck Hill Conservation Land. That input included letters and attending Zoning Board of Appeals meetings to not only convey our concerns about development's implications for the conservation land, but also to request conditions for approval that included dark sky lighting, preserving the historic stone wall, and maintaining as many trees as possible, among others. The Zoning Board included many of the Steward's requests in its conditions.

The Stewards appreciate all the Town officials, employees, and residents of Southborough who supported the Breakneck Hill Conservation Land in 2024. In particular, we want to thank Melissa Danza, the Conservation Agent; the Conservation Commissioners; and the Department of Public Works, who keeps our trails in tiptop shape. And we are grateful that the residents of Southborough continue to enjoy the property.